

postal employees and ED Agents who participated in the postal strike in December, 2000. The matter was thereafter considered carefully in consultation with the Ministry of Finance. It was found that as per provisions of Fundamental Rule 17(1), employees who remained absent from duty without any authority are not entitled to any pay and allowances for the period of such absence. It is also relevant that postal strike of December, 2000 was declared illegal by the Government as it was in contravention of provisions of Industrial Disputes Act. According to the provisions contained in FR-17A, the period of unauthorized absence during strike which is declared illegal under the Industrial disputes Act 1947 or any other law for the time being in force, shall not only debar from pay and allowances during the period of such absence but shall also be deemed to cause interruption of break in service of employees unless and other wise decided by the competent authority.

Decisions taken by the Government in respect of postal strikes in 1996 and 1998 which were not declared illegal were with specific reference to the attendant facts and circumstances. The postal strike of December, 2000 was declared illegal by the Government and the actions taken thereafter are in accordance with the long-standing provisions of Fundamental Rules relating to terms and conditions of government employees.

Impact of VRS on the working of Public Sector Banks

*9. SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN:
SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) what was the staff strength in different categories of various Public Sector Banks including State Bank of India Group before the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) was introduced and after the introduction of VRS;

(b) whether it is a fact that some branches of these banks have been closed down or are understaffed after the VRS has been implemented;

(c) if so, the details of such banks; and

(d) the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) The staff strength in Public Sector Banks as on 31.3.2000 was as follows:—

		(No. in lacs)
Officers	:	2.43
Clerks	:	4.39
Subordinate staff	:	1.92
Total	:	8.74

The Voluntary Retirement Scheme is still in operation and it is not possible to indicate the exact number of employees in banks after VRS.

(b) to (d) Government have not received any information about closure of branches due to VRS. However, banks are in the process of redeploying the employees from the surplus pockets to the deficit pockets to ensure proper staffing of branches.

Restoration of communication links in earthquake Ravaged Gujarat

*10. SHRI DILIP SINGH JUDEV:
SHRI RAJU PARMAR:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are planning to set up an ultra-modern telecommunication system for the earthquake ravaged districts in Gujarat;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government have installed Satellite Telephones in the remote areas/villages in Gujarat; if so, the details thereof; and

(d) what is the estimated loss on account of damage to the